The man who came between

by HENRY KIRK

HE could distinctly hear some one approaching and he paused in his work, crouching before the open safe. In a handkerchief at his feet were the shining contents of several of the drawers he had succeeded in opening. He had almost finished his job, and the prospect of being interrupted at the last minute was disappointing.

It was a slow, regular footfall that he heard. It paused outside the door and the man looked for a place of hiding. It was too far to the open window and there were no convenient hangings. The huge library table would cover him well enough, but scarcely conceal him.

Closing the door of the safe he rose to his feet, his eyes searching every curve and corner in the room. With quick decision, he crouched in the angle of the safe and the wall, and then he heard the door open and the slow measured footsteps come toward the safe with a precision that was almost ghostly.

It was the tightest place the man had ever found himself in, and he had followed his business for some years. Yet he had selected this particular house as a desirable point of attack and had carefully chosen the time.

In this instance the danger was unusually irritating to the man, for the rewards of his research were immediate and most gratifying. Now they seemed as far away as they had been before he had ever thought of them.

Silently he wedged himself into his corner and waited, one hand on the revolver in his back pocket. The steps reached the safe, but there was no indication that the loot upon the floor was detected. He scarcely breathed as he waited for the muzzle of a pistol to turn the corner and blacken in his face.

Instead, the tips of four fingers and a thumb came into his vision; a hand followed, and then an arm stretched past him. After this the shoulder, face and figure of a man, with wide eyes staring ahead, came from the front of the safe.

The man loosened his hold on his gun and with his other hand clutched his throat as a sensation of terror crept over him. The staring eyes were undoubtedly sightless, and there was scarcely life in the rigid arm; only the fingers moved, touching the wall and the backs of chairs.

The blind man made his way to the table and sat down. He opened a drawer slowly and placed his hand upon an object inside. His lips moved.

"It is too much," he whispered, "when it is always like this—fearful night, and I can see nothing—nothing that lives and moves. The strength with which I have made myself bear it is almost gone!"

In the angle of the safe the man lowered his head with each word. He looked at the prostrate figure at the table and then turned his eyes about as if striving to make some expression of sympathy. It was rought enough to be in such a way.

Then a sense of huge relief came over him. This man did not know that he was there. He could easily get beyond him to the window and make his escape. It would be only the work of a very short moment to pick up the handkerchief of jewels, and with a few long strides reach the window and safety.

He looked down at the shining stones and then measured the distance before him. Moving a little from his angle, he stretched his arm out before him, his eyes full upon the man at the table.

"No light—no light!" murmured the sightless man. "No day, but only night—a sleep without rest. What joy in what I have, what peace when I am condemned to this wretchedness?"

The man at the safe drew in his arm and shook his head. There was no sport deceiving a blind chap, no game worth while. He scorned the simplicity and easiness of it, the lack of science. It would not be worth ten times the prize in his handkerchief.

His way was obvious, and it was the window. He would have to leave the handkerchief behind, but he could get another, and there were no marks upon the old to betray him.

He calculated once more the distance of his flight and put out his foot. The man at the table took out his hand from the drawer and he paused abruptly. In the hand was a pistol, which was instantly raised to the sightless eyes.

"It's no use—no use. I—" The sentence was not finished, for the weapon was roughly knocked from his grasp.

"What are you doin', governor!"

The blind man started with an exclamation of terror.

"Who are you?"

"Don't let that bother you, governor, I ain't anybody."

"What are you doing in my house? Did you wish to see me?"

The man smiled faintly. "No, governor, I can't say that I did. I happened to be in the neighborhood and I sort of took a notion, don't you see?"

"No, I don't. I don't understand."

"Well, if it's all the same to you, governor, I'll be off about now, so I hope you'll excuse me."

"You can see I am blind."

"Sure, I seen that right off. It's a hard deal, all right, but you know you don't want to do anything foolish, anything you might be sorry for."

"How did you get into my house? Do you belong on the place?"

"It's as I was just sayin', governor. I was going by and I thought—well, you see, I thought—but say, I don't think it will interest you my spielin' about what I thought. I just dropped in and I was on my way out when you takes up the gun.

"It gave me a scare, I can tell you. Can't you hear my heart goin'? Dangerous proposition, governor, when you fool with a thing of this kind. You never can tell just what one of them will do."

He looked down at the face of the man in the chair before him. The eyes were strained and staring into space. There were lines of terror about the mouth and the fingers of the hands twitched painfully. The shoulders shook every few moments with the nervousness of wretchedness and despair.

He looked about the room, at the heavy furniture and the elaborate ornaments on the mantel. The table was littered with valuable things, and behind him was his handkerchief full of shining gems. Then he looked back at the sightless face and he felt himself something like a god in his own power.

"Yes, it's a tough game, governor, but you've got to buck up against it, you know. We all have something or other, only every one doesn't know about it. Why, when I seen you pickin' up that gun I had the cold chills. You can imagine how you'd feel yourself. We've all got troubles of some

"Courage! That ain't courage. It takes courage to do what I've been doing for years. Say, when I seen your hand coming and the arm, I nearly had a fit."

"Who are you?" demanded the blind man wearily. "Why should you be afraid? You can see. Were you trying to take anything from the house?"

"Take anything?" The man cast a regretful glance at the handkerchief behind him. "No, I ain't taking anything. It's quite the other way, governor. I'm leaving something, but don't let that bother you I'll get along without it. Guess I'll have to travel now."

He started toward the window, but a sudden idea made him wheel about and pick the revolver from the floor.

"I think I'll take this, anyhow," he said. "You're better off without it."

Some instinct told the blind man what had happened. He sprang from his chair, his face contorted with despair and terror.

"Don't take that," he cried, stretching out his hands to the burglar. "Take what you want, take all that stuff in the safe. I can't see it—it's no good to me—but leave me that revolver. You must be a burglar. Why don't you take my things, then, and leave me to do what I like with myself. Who knows what I might have seen by now if you had left me alone."

The other paused with one leg over the window-sill.

"I'm too old a hand to do much at reforming," he said cynically, "but I ain't stealin' from blind people, nor children—not yet. And I ain't running any suicide bureau neither, so I guess I'll keep the gun. Good night, governor," and he vanished into the darkness.

DISCOVERIES MADE BY ACCIDENT

A Hen With Clay on Her Feet Showed Us How to Whiten Sugar, and the Blunder of a Woman Gave the World Tinted Paper, Besides Making Her Husband Rich

VALUABLE discoveries have been made, and valuable inventions suggested, by the veriest accidents. An alchemist, while seeking to discover a mixture of earths that would make the most durable crucibles, one day found that he had made porcelain.

The power of lenses, as applied to the telescope, was discovered by a watchmaker's apprentice. While holding spectacle-glasses between his thumb and finger, he was startled at the suddenly enlarged appearance of a neighboring church-spire.

The art of etching upon glass was discovered by a Nuremberg glass-cutter. By accident, a few drops of aqua fortis fell upon his spectacles. He noticed that the glass became corroded and softened where the acid had touched it. That was hint enough. He drew figures upon glass with varnish, applied the corroding fluid, then cut away the glass around the drawing. When the varnish was removed, the figures appeared raised upon a dark ground.

Mezzotinto owed its invention to the simple accident of the gun-barrel of a sentry becoming rusted with dew.

The swaying to and fro of a chandelier in a cathedral suggested to Galileo the application of the pendulum.

The art of lithographing was perfected through suggestions made by accident.

A poor musician was curious to know whether music could not be etched upon stone as well as upon copper. After he had prepared his slab, his mother asked him to make a memorandum of such clothes as she proposed to send away to be washed.

Not having pen, ink, and paper convenient, he wrote the list on the stone with the etching preparation, intending to make a copy of it at leisure. A few days later, when about to clean the stone, he wondered what effect aqua fortis would have upon it. He applied the acid, and in a few minutes saw the writing standing out in relief. The next step necessary was simply to ink the stone and take off an impression.

The composition of which printing-rollers are made was discovered by a Salopian printer. Not being able to find the pelt-ball, he inked the type with a piece of soft glue which had fallen out of a glue-pot. It was such an excellent substitute that, after mixing molasses with the glue, to give the mass proper consistency, the old pelt-ball was entirely discarded.

The shop of a Dublin tobacconist, by the name of Lundyfoot, was destroyed by fire. While he was gazing dolefully into the smoldering ruins, he noticed that his poorer neighbors were gathering the snuff from the canisters. He tested the snuff for himself, and discovered that the fire had largely improved its pungency and aroma. It was a hint worth profiting by. He secured another shop, built a lot of ovens, subjected the snuff to a heating process, gave the brand a particular name, and in a few years became rich through an accident which he at first thought had completely ruined him.

The process of whitening sugar was discovered in a curious way. A hen that had gone through a clay puddle went with her muddy feet into a sugar-house. She left her tracks on a pile of sugar. It was noticed that wherever her tracks were the sugar was whitened. Experiments were instituted, and the result was that wet clay came to be used in refining sugar.

The origin of blue-tinted paper came about by a mere slip of the hand. The wife of William East, an English paper-maker, accidentally let a blue bag fall into one of the vats of pulp. The workmen were astonished when they saw the peculiar color of the paper, while Mr. East was highly incensed over what he considered a grave pecuniary loss. His wife was so much frightened that she would not confess her part in it.

After storing the damaged paper for four years, Mr. East sent it to his agent at London, with instructions to sell it for what it would bring. The paper was accepted as a "purposed novelty," and was disposed of at a big price.

Mr. East was astonished at receiving an order from his agent for another large invoice of the paper. He was without the secret, and found himself in a dilemma. Upon mentioning it to his wife, she told him about the accident. He kept the secret, and the demand for the novel tint far exceeded his ability to supply it.

William Henry Jones' Courtships

By JOSEPH N. QUAIL

NO casual glance into the pale-gray eyes behind the heavy glasses, which advertised their near-sightedness, would ever have revealed the wealth of sentiment their owner believed to be embodied in his own proper person.

"Mask your feelings and your thoughts," William Henry Jones was fond of saying, "and you may study the world without permitting the world to study you."

William Henry had reached the age of discretion—he was forty-two. He was above, far above, the average in intelligence—his own estimate. He knew his own mind, being nearer to it than any one else, and, barring defective eyesight, was physically sound from top to toe of his five feet four inches. From all of which it may be inferred that he was rather well pleased with himself.

Jones's other name for Sentiment was Myrtle Smyles. He was convinced that she was his true mate—the one woman in all the wide world whom he would ever invite to share his heart and his home. And yet he was studiously careful to show to her twin sister Ivy just as many courtesies and kindnesses and little attentions as he paid to Myrtle.

"It is a good thing," he would say, communing with himself, "to keep a woman guessing. It gives her mind something upon which to feed and predisposes her to appreciate happiness at its full worth when it comes.

"One of these days I shall ask Myrtle to marry me. If I were to ask her now and she should accept—as there is no doubt she would—something might interfere with my plans. That would mean delays, postponements, and what not. Now, delays mean disappointments, and disappointments sour a woman's disposition. And of course I couldn't be expected to marry a sour disposition. Then again, if I were to propose now she would feel sure of me, and it isn't well for a man to let a woman feel too sure of him. It might develop in her a tendency to dictate."

Jones carried his diplomacy a little further.

"No man," he observed one evening in the Smyles's drawing-room, "should marry until he has laid by the wherewithal to provide his bride and his home with all of the necessaries and some of the comforts of life."

"May I ask what you—er—consider a sufficiency for that purpose?" Myrtle's mother inquired.

"I should not think of entering the blessed state with less than twenty thousand dollars in the bank," Jones replied with decision.

"Twenty thousand nutmegs!" Mr. Smyles ejaculated. "Why, man alive, when I was married I didn't have twenty thousand cents! And if we'd waited until I had twenty thousand dollars, we'd be waiting yet. Eh, mother?"

"It takes a long time to save twenty thousand dollars," Mrs. Smyles said with a sigh.

"That depends," observed William Henry complacently. "It has, I confess, taken me the best part of ten years to store up in the neighborhood of seventeen thousand dollars; but you'll admit, I am sure, that with this amount drawing interest, it will take a much shorter time to gather the last three thousand dollars than it did the first."

"Yes, that is true," Mrs. Smyles assented, and seemed to find some comfort in the fact.

"It wouldn't make the slightest difference to me whether the man I loved had much or little," Myrtle observed. "Think of wasting the best part of one's life in a scramble for wealth that may be won too late and of the lost years of companionship. It's all too sad to contemplate. When I find my prince I shall take him as he is, rich or poor."

"Prince?" William Henry repeated, a shade of reproach in his tone.

"Just a figure of speech, Mr. Jones," Myrtle's mother hastened to say. "The man she marries will be a prince to her, even though the world call him a pauper."

"Why, mother, how can a man be a pauper if he has seventeen thousand dollars in the bank?" Ivy asked innocently.

"Seventeen thousand dollars!" Myrtle's father moistened his lips and permitted the words to dribble over them in a way which suggested that he found them sweet and tasty. "And twenty is the mark? Then, my boy, I should imagine that you must be drawing near to the grand climax."

"I have also," said William Henry, mentally shaking hands with himself, "some small investments which, my broker tells me, look promising—very promising. They already show a good profit, and it is not at all unlikely that within the week I shall have added rather more than three thousand dollars to my bank account."

"And then?" inquired Mr. Smyles, rubbing his hands and smiling knowingly at Jones. Mrs. Smyles waited breathlessly for the answer.

William Henry met the smile with one which was enigmatic. He beamed through his glasses upon Myrtle for exactly four-fifths of a second, and then upon Ivy for exactly one second lacking a fifth. He unlocked his hands, stuck the thumb of the right in the armhole of his waistcoat, combed his scant forelock with the fingers of the left, and, rising, said:

"And then, we shall see—we shall see. Good-night."

It was on Friday, just before the closing hour, that Jones appeared at his bank with a certified check for three thousand eight hundred and forty-seven dollars and twelve cents, which half an hour before he had received from his broker. He deposited this, and then drew his own check for one thousand five hundred dollars.

"Give it to me in nice, crisp hundred-dollar bills," he said, beaming on the paying-teller with unwonted good humor.

"Going to take another little flier?" queried that individual, regarding Jones quizzically.

"I am going to take a little flier," corrected William Henry, "but not 'another.' It will be the first and only one in this line, sir. I am going to be married."

"Aha!" said the paying-teller. "So you're one of the brave ones. They tell me the risk in matrimony is even greater than in Wall Street. However, I wish you joy."

"I thank you," said Jones with dignity. "But do not let your friends string you about the risk. Study the field and the woman, as I have done, and you will find there is very little risk in the undertaking."

"When does it come off?" asked the paying-teller, handing out the bills.

"I shall announce the engagement this evening, sir," said Jones. "As for the rest time will tell."

"To-night? Friday! I thought lovers, like gamblers, were superstitious?"

"I am proud to say I am not superstitious," returned William Henry, counting the bills over a second time. "Only persons of a low order of intelligence permit themselves to be swayed by superstition. This bill is somewhat frayed. May I ask you to give me a clean one in its place? It's for a very particular purpose, and I—thank you very much. Good day."

At Chambers Street, William Henry crossed Broadway to wait for an uptown car. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that he attempted to cross Broadway. He dodged behind a down-town car, to find himself directly in the path of one moving north, and he jumped back off the track just in time to meet an automobile which was following the down-town car.

"That was a close call," said the big policeman, who lifted him out of the mire and sat him on the curb. "It was a mighty unlucky move you made."

"Unlucky!" spluttered Jones. "If you have the number of the machine, I will undertake to prove that it was unlucky for the owner. No man can run me down with impunity!"

"I have the number, all right," said the policeman, "but hadn't you better make sure that you're really hurt before you get to talking about a damage suit?"

"Hurt?" Jones repeated indignantly. "Can't a man be hurt in his feelings—his pride? And it had to happen to-day of all the days in the week!"

"Friday's the busy day on this corner, sure's you're born," said the policeman.

"Bah!" Jones ejaculated in disgust. "Where are my glasses?"

"Here's the nose-piece—all that's left of them," and the policeman handed it to him.

"Broken!" wailed Jones. "However will I get home? I'll have to ask you to help me on my car. I can't see without them."

"Sure," said the policeman. "Broadway?"

"No, Lexington Avenue."

"Here you are, then," said the policeman, and put him safely aboard.

Splashed and smeared with mud, Jones groped his way to the center of the car and dropped into a seat next a young woman. She drew her skirts away in anger, and then rose and hurried to the platform.

"It's an outrage that a person in such a condition should be permitted to ride in cars used by decent people!" she cried.

The voice sounded familiar to Jones. He turned toward the speaker, but could not distinguish her features.

"I will get off here and wait for another car," she went on indignantly. "My gown has been ruined, but I shall make your company pay for it."

Then she stepped off, stopping in the middle of the street to preen her feathers and to cast an angry glance through the car-window at William Henry.

"Now, what do you think of that?" the conductor asked of nobody in particular as he rang the bell. "Kin I refuse to let a souse ride, particularly when a cop hands him to me, just because there's a woman aboard."

"Sir!" exclaimed Jones.

"Aw, sit down and close your trap, or I'll throw you off on your head!" the conductor growled. "You've made me trouble enough as it is."

Near-sighted as he was, Jones could make out that the conductor was an individual of too much bulk to be defied by a small man on his way to make a proposal of marriage, and he relapsed into indignant silence.

It was just dusk as William Henry, fresh from the hands of the barber and newly attired but still minus his glasses, climbed the steps leading to the Smyles's domicile. Some one was practising on the piano in the unlighted parlor, and he rang twice before the maid opened the door.

"Is Miss Smyles in?" Jones asked.

It was characteristic of him not to indicate which of the twins he meant. Although he knew that Ivy was the elder by three-quarters of an hour, it would have wrenched his system to have asked directly, "Is Miss Myrtle in?"

"She is in the parlor, I think," said the maid.

Without waiting to be asked, Jones stepped briskly in, tripped over the rug between the double doors, and found himself face to face with Fate.

He had, however, prepared himself for the encounter, and now gave full rein to his ardor, so long repressed. He embraced Fate as she rose from the piano and glued his lips to hers.

There was a momentary struggle and a gasp; and then, for a fleeting moment before she tore herself away, Jones felt the gentle pressure of a pair of warm arms about his neck and the thrill of a kiss returned.

"Oh, don't—don't!" she cried, shrinking from him. "There is—there must be some mistake!"

"Will you marry me?" William Henry asked, breathing hard.

"You don't mean it!" was the half-articulate response from the darkness.

"I do! I do!" cried Jones. He fumbled in his pocket. "See, here is the ring. Let me put it on your finger."

He groped until he found her hand, raised it to his lips, and then slipped upon one of its fingers a ring with a stone so large and so brilliant that it seemed a coal of fire in the gloom.

Once more William Henry reached out for his Fate. Once more he drew her to him. This time there was no resistance.

Footsteps were heard in the upper hallway; and as she disengaged herself from his arms and sank limply into a chair, Jones drew from his pocket a roll of crisp bills and pressed them into her hand.

"You will purchase your own wedding present with this," he said hurriedly. "I am all unstrung and will not wait to see the others now. You must make my excuses for me. Once more, my love, and then good night."

Hurriedly they embraced and then, as steps were heard descending the stairs, Jones tore himself away, grabbed his hat from the hall-rack, and staggered out into the night.

"Who was that?" a querulous voice asked from the stairway.

"Mr. Jones, mother," Ivy answered. "He only stopped for a moment."

She passed her mother with lowered head to conceal her blazing cheeks and sought the privacy of her own chamber, there to admire her ring, examine her wedding-present, and recover from her surprise.

When William Henry Jones reached his office in the morning, after a visit to his oculist, he found upon his desk a letter addressed in a handwriting well known to him. It bore a special-delivery stamp and the date of the night before. It was from Myrtle.

With his mind full of pleasant imaginings, Jones sat down at his desk and turned the missive over and over in his hands while he turned over and over in his mind the incidents of the evening before. He felt again the thrill of the kiss which had told him he was indeed the adored one, the prince who would always be a prince even though the world called him a pauper. He pressed the precious missive to his lips—then opened it.

The very first word shattered his dreams.

"Sir," it began bluntly and coldly, and then, in straightforward fashion, proceeded to inform him that his conduct of the previous afternoon and evening had been such that she felt it imperative to terminate their acquaintance at once and forever.

William Henry, in a fog or bewilderment, laid down the note and took up the envelope. There was no mistake about it. It was plainly intended for him. The address was perfectly correct.

"But my conduct!" he protested to the sheet of scented note-paper. "What have I done? What could have happened to change her opinion of me so suddenly and so completely?

"My conduct!" he repeated, reddening with anger. "I may have been too eager, too ardent, but surely she knew what was coming, and at the very moment she condoned it—with a kiss."

He softened at the thought, and again took up the note. But he choked and gasped and snorted and fumed as he read it through to the last bitter word.

"But what's the use? I notice, however, that she has not returned my ring, nor the wedding-present. What am I to assume from that? She must have seen me after the accident, and probably imagined that I had been rolling in the gutter for pleasure. A woman of poor judgment, of no sympathy—a common scold!

"She expects me to seek her humbly and explain, and perhaps apologize to her because she wrote such an unwomanly letter! She is presuming already upon her proprietorship. But she doesn't know Jones. No, siree. She doesn't know Jones."

William Henry paced his narrow office from end to end as an enraged lion fumes in his cage. His strides had brought him near to the door, when it was opened by a carrier, who handed him another special-delivery letter.

"She has discovered her error, I suppose," he muttered sourly as he signed the recipt, "and this is an effort to smooth matters over. But she can never be the same to me again—never!"

The superscription was indeed in Myrtle's hand, but the contents were not. In less than a minute William Henry was raging in white-hot anger. This is what he read:

Saturday.

JONES:

You will oblige me by discontinuing your visits to my house. I do not consider a man of your habits a fit associate for my children.

When I meet you, if you happen then to be sober enough to understand English, I shall demand of you an explanation of your daring to enter my home in a maudlin condition, propose marriage to one of my daughters, and then cause the newspapers to publish notices of your engagement to the other.

The original of the enclosed notice, I am informed by telephone from the newspaper offices, is indorsed with your name and address.

You are a contemptible scoundrel.

N. O. SMYLES.

"Certainly I put that notice in the papers!" Jones bellowed, frantic with rage. "Make the most of it! I'd undo it myself if I could! Smyles is an idiot! Bah! Bah!"

There was a timid knock on the door. Jones dashed at it and threw it wide open.

"Come in!" he roared, then drew back in amazement as Ivy faced him meekly and with unshed tears in her eyes.

"My dear Ivy," he apologized. "I thought it was more trouble."

"It is!" she sobbed as he closed the door behind her. Then she sank into a chair, covered her eyes with her ungloved hands, and wept bitterly.

William Henry staggered back against his desk as he saw gleaming on her engagement finger the gem he supposed he had placed upon Myrtle's hand.

"This is an unexpected pleasure!" he stammered.

"Say, rather, a heart-break!" sobbed Ivy. "I've come to return your ring."

"Why?" William Henry demanded, his senses reeling.

"I told you it was a mistake when you asked me to marry you," she said.

Her lips quivered, and he saw a tear fall upon her hand.

"But it wasn't!" William Henry cried, remembering only the thrill of joy he had derived from the kiss of the woman before him. "It wasn't. To prove it, I ask you again to be my wife—now—here! Mistake? Nonsense!"

"Then what does this mean?" Ivy sobbed, holding out a printed slip clipped from a morning newspaper. "It announces your engagement to Myrtle!"

"That," said William Henry, his mind made up and his confidence returning—"that means nothing, absolutely nothing. I will see that the newspapers publish a correction tomorrow."

Then he calmly folded her in his arms and kissed her.

"But father?" Ivy protested.

"Leave him to me," said Jones grimly.

"I don't understand yet," she said doubtfully, "how they could have got Myrtle's name in the paper. Do you?"

"That," said Jones unblushingly, "is easy to explain. You see, it was one of those what-do-you-call-'ems—a typographical error, my love."